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October 4, 2018

DAILY NEWS NYDailyNews.com

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Hail yeah, to taxi pay rules

BY DAN RIVOLI
TRANSIT REPORTER

Taxi officials' bold step to set pay rules on the app-hailed trips was deemed a good start by drivers who have struggled to make money.

Drivers packed an auditorium at the National Museum of the American Indian Wednesday to hear Taxi and Limousine Commission officials discuss their plan to get drivers a minimum wage of \$17.22 an hour, after expenses, or \$25.76 total — the first time an entity anywhere regulated driver pay where Uber and other app companies operate.

But some drivers were skeptical.

"I don't think it'll really increase that much," Uber and Lyft driver Golam Mahbub, 26, said. "You have to consider a lot of costs they didn't consider."

He said he's seen prices for passengers rise, yet paltry pay for himself.

"I saw people being charged from Manhattan to JFK Airport \$140," he said. "What is my part of the share? It is only \$45."

It's estimated that 85% of drivers fall below the new pay standard, and that they would see a 22.5% raise in take-home pay from the new policy, according to a TLC-commissioned study.

The TLC will vote at its next meeting on the new pay policy.

"Today's proposal represents a start, and an important one," TLC Chairwoman Meera Joshi said. "There will no longer be a debate on whether or not drivers deserve protections against unilateral pay cuts that make it hard if not impossible to make a living."

Sohail Rana, 50, an Uber driver and organizer with the Independent Drivers Guild, an Uber-sanctioned group that

represents drivers, said that the new pay rule was crafted without consideration for drivers like him who bought luxury SUVs, which means greater expenses.

"We asked for more money because 22% doesn't cover the expenses and the lease and all that stuff," he said.

The study's authors — James Parrott of the Center for New York City Affairs at the New School and Michael Reich of the Center on Wage and Employment Dynamics at the University of California, Berkeley — say that their formula to raise

wages was imperfect, but aimed at helping the most drivers.

Drivers would get paid based on expenses totaling 58 cents a mile on average plus 28 cents a minute — each divided by the "utilization rate" or time a driver spends with a paying passenger.

The TLC policy calls for a bonus for carpool trips, where the driver makes less money for more work. The study's authors recommends a

\$1 bonus.

For Uber, the average driver spends 58% of an hour with a passenger.

"The purpose of this is to get the companies to more efficiently utilize the drivers' time," Parrott said. "The driver puts up the capital, covers all the expenses for the car and, right now, because there are so many cars out there, relative to the number of paying rides, the drivers are under utilized and their earnings per hour suffers as a result."

Bhairavi Desai, director for the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, told TLC officials, to applause, that the city should create a citywide, fleetwide fare standard based on the taxi meter.

"We support efforts to raise driver earnings while ensuring that any new rules do not negatively impact service," Uber spokeswoman Alix Anfang said in a statement.

'Slave' teach hit for 'judgment'

A white Bronx teacher defended the controversial Middle Passage lesson that could get her fired even as school investigators said she used "poor judgment" when she had students sit on the floor to demonstrate conditions on a slave ship.

Patricia Cummings, a social studies teacher at Middle School 118, "significantly diverged from best practices," during a slavery lesson in January in her demonstration about the discomfort in the belly of slave ships.

"Specifically, the DOE does not ever

include or encourage re-enactments of historical events where students take on roles of victimized people," a chancellor's Office of Special Investigations report concluded.

But Cummings said she is the victim, and that reverse racism could cost her her job. She has filed a \$120 million discrimination suit, and said it could lead to over \$1 billion in damages.

She denied assertions from students that she pressed on a student's back during the demonstration or made any of the kids physically uncomfortable.